

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 237 517

TM 830 092

TITLE Basic Skills Assessment Program: Questions and Answers.
INSTITUTION South Carolina State Dept. of Education, Columbia.
PUB DATE [79]
NOTE 11p.; Paper copy not available due to small print.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) --
Legal/Legislative/Regulatory Materials (090)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Skills; Educational Assessment; *Educational Legislation; Elementary Secondary Education; Mathematics Skills; Reading Skills; *State Programs; Statewide Planning; *Testing Programs; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS *South Carolina Basic Skills Assessment Program

ABSTRACT

The South Carolina Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP) is discussed in a question/answer format. The 20 questions present information regarding the requirements of the legislation as it impacts classroom instruction, parental notification and involvement, recordkeeping, local school curricula, additional instructional materials, developmental activities, continuous assessment, criterion referenced testing, testing dates, testing of handicapped students, 11th grade BSAP test and high school graduation, providing additional time for instruction in basic skills areas, school districts role in teacher inservice for BSAP implementation, and the monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum and instructional methods in each school and school district. (PN)

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Questions and Answers

Question 1. What are the requirements of the Basic Skills legislation which impact on classroom instruction?

Answer: The Basic Skills Assessment Act specifically requires that:

Section 1. The State Board of Education, through the State Department of Education, shall:

"(a) Establish statewide educational objectives in the basic skills for kindergarten through grade 12 and establish minimum standards of student achievement for readiness and Grades 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, and 11. The term 'basic skills' shall include mathematics and the communication skills of reading and writing. . ."

Section 2. All public school boards, through their local school district, shall:

(a) Participate in the basic skills assessment program established by this act.

"(b) Adopt appropriate policies to ensure that a continuous assessment is made of an individual student's progress in relation to the statewide minimum standards of student achievement for readiness and grades 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, and 11."

(c) Prior to the beginning of the 1979-80 school year provide appropriate in-service training for all certified personnel implementing the basic skills assessment program to insure efficient and effective methods of instruction.

(d) Use the results of the tests administered under the basic skills assessment program to help in the diagnosis of student deficiencies.

(e) Provide basic instruction to aid the student in bringing his performance up to the statewide minimum standards for a particular grade when a deficiency is indicated by the results of the tests administered under the basic skills assessment program or other assessment procedures.

(f) (1) Provide in writing test result information to any parent or guardian of a dependent child when the parent or guardian requests such information.

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(2) Provide test information and explanations of deficiencies to a parent or guardian of a dependent child found to have deficiencies and make suggestions for appropriate assistance to be given to the dependent child by the dependent child's parent or guardian.

Comment: Remedial and regular classroom teachers are the basic source for the provision of instruction. In most cases, classroom teachers have been assigned responsibility for:

- (a) providing instruction on the K-12 objectives appropriate to students' instructional needs;
- (b) providing basic instruction on identified objectives for those students scoring below standard; and
- (c) providing appropriate suggestions to enable parents to assist their children who are scoring below standard.

Reference: 1978 Act 631 (as amended): Section 1(a); Section 2(a-f).

Question: 2. What are the parental notification and involvement requirements for BSAP?

Answer: Parental notification and involvement requirements include:

- (a) parents of students who do not meet standards must have the test results provided to them in writing and receive appropriate suggestions as to how they can help their children to improve. The notification to parents of children scoring not ready on the CSAB must also advise them to secure a physical examination for their child;
- (b) parents of students who do meet standards may request and receive test results; and
- (c) a copy of the notification to parents of students who do not meet the standards must be filed in the student's cumulative record.

Reference: 1978 Act 631 (as amended): Section 1(b)(2); Section 2(f)(1)(2); Section 7.

Question: 3. Does the Act require teachers to have on file documentation indicating that parents have been provided suggestions to assist them in helping their children?

Answer: The Act does not require teachers to file documentation that parents have been provided with suggestions for assisting their children. A local school district's policy and established procedures may, however, require a teacher to document communication to parents.

Question: 4. What are the recordkeeping requirements associated with the Basic Skills Assessment Program?

Answer: The legislation specifically requires that school districts shall:

Section 2(b) "Adopt appropriate policies to insure that a continuous assessment is made of an individual student's progress in relation to the statewide minimum standards of student achievement for readiness and grades 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, and 11."

(e) "Provide basic instruction to aid the student in bringing his performance up to the statewide minimum standards for a particular grade when a deficiency is indicated by the results of the tests administered under the Basic Skills Assessment Program or other assessment procedures."

Both of these requirements mandate some form of recordkeeping for those students not meeting the minimum standards. However, no specific recordkeeping system is prescribed by the legislation or the State Department of Education.

A district's recordkeeping system must, as a minimum:

- (a) be correlated with the state objectives for reading, writing, and mathematics;
- (b) be designed to assist teachers in monitoring individual student's acquisition of the skills associated with the state objectives (the skills are defined in Teaching and Testing Our Basic Skills Objectives);
- (c) be useful for planning appropriate instruction for individual students who do not meet the established minimum standards.

Comment: South Carolina's Basic Skills Assessment Program is a K-12 effort which is based upon K-12 instructional objectives in reading, mathematics, and writing. Any recordkeeping system that is implemented should be designed to assist teachers in monitoring individual student's acquisition of the skills associated with the objectives.

The type of records and the amount of documentation maintained should be judged on their usefulness for planning appropriate instruction. Local district decisions on these matters should be realistic and reasonable in terms of overall teacher responsibilities.

Only in rare circumstances, such as the evaluation of a special project, would it be appropriate to require teachers to keep duplicate records.

Reference: 1978 Act 631 (as amended): Section 2(b)(e).

Question: 5. Is a separate recordkeeping system required for the Basic Skills Assessment Program?

Answer: No. A separate recordkeeping system for the Basic Skills Assessment Program is not required. The use of recordkeeping systems, such as a district-developed curriculum record or a commercially prepared basal management system which monitors students' skill development levels may be sufficient if the skills correspond to the basic skills objectives. If skills gaps are identified through a correlation, the district curriculum or basal system could be adapted to accommodate the basic skills objectives.

Question: 6. How does the BSAP fit into local school district curricula?

Answer: The basic skills objectives are purposefully broad in scope. A statewide consensus of educators indicates that these objectives are essential elements to any reading, writing, or mathematics curriculum. As these objectives are fundamental to those basic skills areas, the majority of the objectives are already an integral part of district curricula.

It is essential that districts correlate the state objectives to local curricula. If objectives or attendant subskills are not addressed, the local curricula should be supplemented accordingly. The state objectives are not to be interpreted as representing a total program for reading, writing, and mathematics and should not restrict the district curriculum. Content areas other than reading and mathematics offer frequent opportunities to develop and reinforce the state objectives and should be included in the correlation process.

Reference: 1978 Act 631 (as amended): Section 1(a); Section 2(a)(b).

Question: 7. Where do teachers get the additional materials they may need for addressing the basic instructional needs of those students scoring below standard?

Answer: The Basic Skills Assessment Act does not provide state funds in addition to those provided through the provisions of the South Carolina Education Finance Act as funded by the annual Appropriations Bill. However, the state adopted textbook system does offer a wealth of resources to assist teachers in meeting the basic instructional needs of students scoring below standard. During 1981-82 the state adopted listing of approved mathematics programs has been expanded from five series to nine specifically to secure additional resources which are appropriate for remediation. A similar expansion is planned for the reading textbook adoption in 1982-83.

Funds from a variety of other sources may be utilized to purchase additional instructional resources. Specific sources include:

- (a) Defined Minimum Program (DMP) requirements stipulate that \$1.10 per pupil in grades 1-8 must be budgeted to support remediation activities. A legitimate use of the funds would be to purchase instructional resources keyed to the BSAP objectives;
- (b) effective July 1, 1982, funds under Chapter 2 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (Block Grants) may be used to purchase instructional resources to augment the Basic Skills Program;
- (c) under approved circumstances Title I funds may be appropriately utilized to purchase materials; and
- (d) local revenue may also be used to purchase appropriate materials.

Question: 8. When skill weaknesses are indicated by the BSAP test results, what is required?

Answer: First Grade Readiness Testing
Those students scoring below "88" on the Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery (CSAB) must be provided appropriate developmental activities. Activities provided in grade one should relate specifically to those readiness skills on which students have measured developmental needs. Readiness activities should be provided as long as a child needs them but no child should be locked into an instructional sequence because of initial skill development needs.

Comment: It is imperative that other assessments be conducted by classroom teachers. The CSAB assesses students on 12 of the 18 kindergarten objectives. The remaining 6 objectives are to be assessed through teacher observation. Additionally, classroom teachers are encouraged to conduct additional assessments on a continuing basis to monitor student progress.

End-of Year Testing Grades 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, (Later 11)
The legislation refers not to remediation but to the provision of basic instruction. Basic instruction must be provided to assist students scoring below standard in bringing their level of performance up to statewide minimum standards. Teachers are to provide assistance to students with skill weaknesses.

It should be emphasized that the results of the basic skills tests are diagnostic only in terms of broad objectives. Teachers will need to conduct further diagnosis with students scoring below standard to identify specific skill weaknesses. The legislation anticipated the need for such additional diagnosis in its requirement that special assistance be provided "when a deficiency is indicated by the results of the tests administered under the Basic Skills Assessment Program or other assessment procedures."

It is the intent of the legislation that students who need help to become proficient in mathematics or the communication skills of reading and writing receive help. The language of the legislation itself indicates that the test results are to be used "as an aid in determining instruction needed" and not as a replacement for the judgment of classroom teachers.

Comment: The Basic Skills Assessment Program should be viewed as an integral part of the ongoing instructional program rather than dealing with the basic skills objectives in isolation. It is also strongly recommended that all teachers assume a part of the responsibility for providing assistance. Most content areas offer opportunities for reinforcing the basic skills objectives. For example, the mathematics objective "interpreting tables and graphs" may be dealt with by a literature teacher in the construction of a timeline of a novel, by a science teacher in charting average monthly rainfall, or in the construction of histograms by a teacher of basic economics.

Reference: 1978 Act 631 (as amended): Section 1(b)(1), 1(c)(2), 2(b)(d)(e).

Question: 9. The legislation requires that "continuous assessment is made of an individual student's progress in relation to the statewide minimum standards of student achievement . . ." What does continuous assessment mean?

Answer: The legislation requires that all school districts shall:

Section 2(b) Adopt appropriate policies to ensure that a continuous assessment is made of an individual student's progress in relation to the statewide minimum standards of student achievement for readiness and grades 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, and 11.

Continuous assessment requires that, as a student scoring below standard moves through a district curriculum and encounters state objectives, teachers will identify deficiencies to the subskill level and provide instruction accordingly. It is also necessary that an end-of-year summary of each individual student's progress be placed in the student's records to be used by his teachers the following year in planning appropriate instruction.

Reference: 1978 Act 631 (as amended): Section 2(b).

Question: 10. Are there plans to make the Basic Skills Program tests diagnostic to the subskill level?

Answer: Not at the present time. To do so would require that the tests be lengthened considerably. It would also require additional testing time for all students as well as increased costs for test development and scoring. The legislation is aimed at students who have deficiencies and are below minimum standards. The use of increased testing time for all students in order to provide diagnostic information for those below standard does not appear warranted.

Question: 11. Why are students who are functioning below grade level given on-grade-level tests?

Answer: The BSAP legislation directed the State Board of Education to "establish minimum standards of student achievement" in reading, writing, and mathematics for grades 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, and 11. The tests are intended to identify every student whose developed abilities in reading, writing, or mathematics fall below a level of performance determined to be a minimum for his grade placement. The tests are criterion-referenced in the sense that they measure student performance against a criterion, "a standard on which a judgment or decision may be based."

Reference: 1978 Act 631 (as amended): Section 1(a)(c)(e)(f); Section 4.

Question: 12. Test scores are received too late to schedule students. Can the testing date be changed?

Answer: The present legislation calls for end-of-year testing in order to provide maximum instructional time. The testing date could be changed through legislative amendment. Time and experience with the Basic Skills Assessment Program should determine the

most effective date for testing. Since student placement or grouping should never be made based solely on one test or measure, it is more appropriate to use existing records, teacher observations, and other data to make decisions for planning students' daily schedules.

Reference: 1978 Act 631 (as amended): Section 1(c)(2); (d)(2); (f).

Question: 13. Are handicapped students to be included in the BSAP testing?

Answer: Handicapped students are to be included in the BSAP testing unless their Individual Education Plans as required under Public Law 94-142 indicate that they should be excluded.

Reference: 1978 Act 631 (as amended): Section 3.

Question: 14. What are teacher responsibilities in grades where no BSAP test results are available?

Answer: Teachers with assigned responsibility for basic skills instruction who teach in grades where no BSAP tests results are available are responsible for providing instruction which incorporates the basic skills objectives. In view of the fact that the law mandated the establishment of "statewide educational objectives in the basic skills for kindergarten through grade twelve", the program requires sequential instruction with students being periodically assessed through BSAP testing.

Reference: 1978 Act 631 (as amended): Section 1(a).

Question: 15. What effect will the eleventh grade test have upon high school graduation?

Answer: Section 3 of the Basic Skills Assessment Act mandates that the State Board of Education, through the State Department of Education, shall:

(e) Develop or select, and field test, tests that will measure student achievement in the basic skills areas of reading, writing, and mathematics at the end of grade 11 which shall include items requiring the application of school skills to life situations. The field test shall be conducted for the purpose of establishing the reliability and validity of the test.

(f) Beginning in the school year 1981-82 and continuing through the school year 1986-87, administer the test

specified in item (e) of this section to all students in grade eleven for the purpose of collecting baseline data. The Department of Education shall use the baseline data for the purpose of program assessment and shall provide assistance to those schools or districts in which the data indicates that program adjustment or modification is most needed due to inordinate numbers of children not passing the test. The State Board of Education shall use the baseline data for the purpose of determining the high school credentials to be awarded students not meeting the minimum achievement scores.

Comment: At the present time the eleventh grade test does not have any impact on high school graduation.

Reference: 1978 Act 631 (as amended): Section 1(e)(f).

Question: 16. May a school district require a student who scores below standard on the basic skills test to earn additional credits beyond those required by the State Board of Education to qualify for a State High School Diploma?

Answer: No. The South Carolina State High School Diploma requirements are delineated in the Defined Minimum Program for South Carolina Schools. Inasmuch as that diploma is issued by the State Board of Education, a local district board of trustees cannot supersede the authority of the State Board.

Local school boards do have the authority to issue and regulate a local certificate in addition to the State High School Diploma.

Question: 17. Can the Defined Minimum Program standards be waived to provide additional time for instruction in the basic skills areas?

Answer: In grades 1-6, the time requirements established for students who are eligible and receive supplemental instruction (Title I, handicapped, gifted, etc.) may be flexible if those students receive some planned instruction in each subject area. For students not served in these programs (Title I, handicapped, gifted, etc.), the standards for time are applicable.

Students in grades 7 and 8 are to receive 250 minutes weekly in both language arts and mathematics. The minimum time requirements established for other content areas may not be substituted for additional basic skills instruction.

The DMP recommends that students in grades 7 and 8 who are reading two or more grade levels below their grade placement be provided with an additional 250 minutes of reading instruction. But regardless of the amount of time provided, at least 50 percent of the language arts instructional time must be devoted to composition and grammar. Basic skills writing test results should be considered in planning grammar and composition activities to meet individual student needs.

At the high school level, required credits earned in the areas of language arts and mathematics may not be substituted for units of credit in other content areas. However, courses in remedial English with an emphasis on reading and functional English, developmental or remedial reading may be substituted for credit applied toward the language arts requirement. Students provided with developmental or remedial reading courses that replace regular English courses should be provided with writing opportunities within the framework of the reading courses. Additional courses in language arts and mathematics may be taken and elective credits earned.

Question: 18. What is the role of the school district in assisting teachers through staff development (inservice) to successfully implement the Basic Skills Program?

Answer: The legislation stipulates that "school districts shall: (c) prior to the beginning of the 1979-80 school year provide appropriate inservice training for all certified personnel implementing the Basic Skills Assessment Program to insure efficient and effective methods of instruction."

Comment: Inasmuch as the legislation sets forth a gradual implementation process it is important that districts plan an appropriate staff development program that will support, on a continuing basis, the full implementation of the Basic Skills Assessment Program. Included in the district's inservice plan should be awareness sessions to acquaint all personnel with the Basic Skills Program, as well as activities that are designed to improve or expand proven teaching techniques. Since the assignments and needs of teachers vary within a school and district, the inservice plan should be developed to fit their roles, grade levels, and the instructional needs of the students they teach.

Reference: 1978 Act 631 (as amended): Section 2(c).

Question: 19. Is monitoring of Basic Skills Assessment Program implementation required?

Answer: Yes. The legislation requires the Department of Education to "take necessary administrative action to monitor and evaluate the curriculum and instruction methods in each school district, including on-site visits to selected schools, to insure compliance with the standards and purposes" of the Basic Skills Act.

Reference: 1978 Act 631 (as amended): Section 8.

Question: 20. Will the monitoring report from the State Department of Education list names of teachers who are found not to be in compliance with the Basic Skills Assessment Program?

Answer: No. The monitoring process is not designed to evaluate individual teachers. Instead, it is designed to assess the overall level of Basic Skills Program implementation in a particular school and district.